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WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE ECONOMY

by

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WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE ECONOMY

AMERICAN WOMEN last year made a contribution to the national economy "unequaled at any other peacetime period in our history." Assessing the factors that made 1956 a banner year for women workers, Mrs. Alice K. Leopold, Assistant to the Secretary of Labor for Women's Affairs, said on Feb. 7 that "The favorable economic climate enabled them to achieve an all-time high in employment." She added that "Women's many skills, acquired through their increasing utilization of educational and training facilities, opened doors to new opportunities and brought to women workers a growing recognition."

At the same time, the administration's advocacy of federal legislation to assure women equal pay for equal work pointed to the persistence of long-standing disparities between the sexes in occupational attainment. Although women have made great strides as job-holders in the past half century, and especially in the past 15 years, they are still limited for the most part to lower-level or low-paid jobs.

Past experience would indicate that the average young woman entering employment today is not likely to get much closer to the maximum wage levels attained by male workers than did her forebear of 50 years ago. However, new factors coming into the picture may change that prospect. The fact that the American economy is increasingly dependent on a large and permanent body of woman workers is expected to give women new levers in their struggle for equalization of job status and earnings. Economic planners are looking to women as a major source of skilled labor to maintain or lift present levels of prosperity. Anticipated shortages of trained personnel in scientific and technical fields will put a premium value on female recruits in a widening range of high-grade occupations.

A recent Yale University study of wage structures noted that wide diversity of job remuneration was characteristic

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of the American economy. Although a tendency toward narrowing of pay differentials was found to have developed since 1939 in certain other sectors, "Male-female differentials have changed scarcely at all."¹ Disparity in earnings of the two sexes has existed since women took up employment outside the home.

The first jobs opened to women in large numbers were low-paying and frequently menial. Society a half century ago frowned on the woman who practiced medicine but not on the charwoman who cleaned a doctor's office. Women gained access to jobs in textile mills, for example, because they would accept lower wages than men. Similarly, jobs in such fields as teaching and nursing remained low-paid largely because they were filled traditionally by women; they are still mostly "women's jobs" and the pay scales are still relatively low.

DIFFERENTIALS IN PAY OF WOMEN AND MEN WORKERS

A study sponsored by the Twentieth Century Fund several years ago revealed that earnings of women, as distinct from rates of wages paid, had been "half those of men and earnings of Negro women half those of white women"; also that the ratios had not been affected to any great extent by broadening of women's occupational opportunities.² Latest census figures support this general observation. Median earnings of all women in 1955 were \$1,926, roughly one-half the \$3,797 median for men workers. The differential is accounted for in part by the relatively large number of part-time workers among women. When the part-time group is excluded, however, the disparity is still marked; full-time women workers in 1955 had median earnings of \$2,778, a little more than three-fifths of the male full-time median of \$4,258.

Men make a better over-all wage showing even in occupations in which the majority of workers are women, such as teaching and library work. Job openings listed in public employment offices frequently show preferential wage offers for men. Among samples culled by the U.S. Women's Bureau are the following: Patent researcher, \$70 a week for a man, \$60 for a woman; department store, cashier,

¹ Lloyd G. Reynolds and Cynthia H. Taft, *The Evolution of Wage Structure* (1956), p. 359.

² W. S. Woytinsky and associates, *Employment and Wages in the United States* (1953), p. 451.

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\$50-60 for a man, \$40-45 for a woman; investigation shop-per, \$55 a week for a man, \$40 for a woman.³

CONCENTRATION OF WOMEN IN LOW WAGE BRACKETS

Women's wages lag behind those of men in all industries; the gap is widest in industries which customarily employ large numbers of women.

Nearly every industry has its own pattern of sex differentials in wages. Women's earnings compare most favorably with men's in contract construction, mining, transportation, communication and public utilities—all of which are industries that employ women mainly in clerical jobs. In the service industries, the ratio of women's earnings is also high, particularly at the lowest point of the distribution. In manufacturing and retail trade—which together employ half of all men and two-thirds of all women—women's earnings are particularly low in comparison with those of men.⁴

A Labor Department study of factory workers has shown that "Women's earnings are concentrated within a considerably narrower range at the lower end of the earnings scale than those for men."⁵ Wage ranges were found to vary according to geographic region, yet in nearly every area the distribution was such that the low range included the earnings of 75 per cent of the women as against only 25 per cent of the men. Pay differentials by sex were less marked in the durable goods industries, where 14 per cent of the workers are women, than in non-durables, where women constitute two-fifths of the labor force. Yet the average earnings of male workers in the lower-paying industry group were higher than the average for women in the higher-paying group.

Another government survey, covering pay scales in machinery industries—a relatively new field for women production workers—pointed up the prevailing tendency of industrial employers to place women in less skilled occupations or to classify certain low-rated jobs as primarily for women. Women in the machinery industries work as assemblers, inspectors, and machine-tool operators; average hourly rates of pay in 17 cities range from 77c to \$1.85 for men, from 57c to \$1.32 for women.⁶

³ U.S. Women's Bureau, *Equal Pay Primer* (1955), p. 2.

⁴ W. S. Woytinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 455.

⁵ "Earnings and Employment of Women Factory Workers," *Monthly Labor Review*, October 1955, p. 1126.

⁶ U.S. Department of Labor, *Women Production Workers in the Machinery Industries*, January 1956.

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LOW RATIO OF WOMEN TO MEN IN TOP-RANKING JOBS

Women today do not have much trouble finding jobs, but they show relatively little tendency to advance to higher levels of responsibility and remuneration. Although compensation of both men and women tends to rise in the middle years, the curve is much steeper for men than for women. Women's failure to attain the higher-ranking jobs was reflected in census figures for 1955. Only 4.9 per cent of the female labor force, compared with 12.3 per cent of the male force, was classified as managers, officials, and proprietors. Only 1.1 per cent of women workers, as against 18.8 per cent of men, were craftsmen or foremen.

The fact that a relatively large percentage of women are professional or technical workers—10.7 per cent of those in the labor force compared with 8.1 per cent of the men—is accounted for mainly by the large number of women teachers and nurses, whose pay is relatively low by professional standards. Even among higher-rated groups of women workers, few climb to the top ranks. Many women in the managerial group run small business establishments, such as bakeries and gift shops. In the professions women usually hold positions as assistants. Although they are predominant in the teaching profession, few are school superintendents and no woman heads a coeducational institution of higher learning. In medicine women fill most of the jobs as laboratory technicians and therapists, but the number of woman doctors is relatively small. Women in the business world are more often bookkeepers than accountants or auditors.

Fortune recently estimated that scarcely more than 5,000 women are "executives in the strictest sense of the word."¹ When the Women's Bureau looked over the situation half a dozen years ago, it found comparatively few women in high-ranking jobs even in the business or industrial establishments which hire large numbers of women. Their best showing was in department stores, where two-thirds of the employees and about one-half of those in the better jobs were women. Among insurance companies, two-thirds of whose employees are women, and banks and manufacturing enterprises, where roughly an equal number of each sex is employed; men held four to six times as many high-level posts as women.

¹ Katharine Hamill, "Women as Bosses," *Fortune*, June 1956, p. 105.

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The survey found women officers in all three fields, but "It was still the exceptional woman who had reached officer status." Only four per cent of the officers of department stores and manufacturing concerns were women; among insurance companies the proportion was only two per cent; among banks, only one per cent.⁸ The outstanding success in business of such women as Bernice Fitz-Gibbon, advertising consultant, Margaret Rudkin, president of Pepperidge Farm, and Dorothy Shaver, former president of Lord & Taylor, is the more conspicuous because it is so rare.

GAINS IN OCCUPATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

Notwithstanding persisting discrepancies in pay and in job assignments, women's status in the labor force has risen markedly in recent years. The gains attained during World War II have been not only sustained but also enlarged. Employment of women today is at an all-time high, up 50 per cent over a decade and a half ago. Census returns show that the number of women in the labor force increased from 14 million in 1940 to 18 million in 1950. One-half of the rise resulted from growth of the population of working age and one-half from growth of the proportion of women who work. By 1956 the number of women in the labor force reached 21 million (including 800,000 unemployed), and women constituted 32 per cent of the total number of workers.⁹

Even more impressive than the numerical growth of the female labor force is the opening up to women of jobs formerly held only by men. Most women workers are still concentrated in traditional fields; as many as one-half of them are office workers, teachers, nurses, retail saleswomen, domestic workers, garment workers, bookkeepers, and waitresses. However, census takers in 1950 found at least a few women employed in each of the 446 occupations or occupational groups tallied. Women job-holders included railroad conductors and foremen, aeronautical and mining engineers, automobile repairers, cement finishers, truck drivers, and piano tuners.

Between 1940 and 1950 sizable increases in the number of women workers took place, not only in the traditional occupations, but also in the professions, in durable goods

⁸ U.S. Women's Bureau, *Women in Higher-Level Positions* (1950).

⁹ At the peak of wartime employment, in 1944, there were 19.5 million women on the job.

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manufacturing, among electrical machinery operatives, among craftsmen, and among manager-proprietors. The number of women radio operators, veterinarians, surveyors, technical engineers, draftsmen, chemists, airplane pilots, accountants, pharmacists, and clergymen—though still relatively small—more than doubled in the decade. Women still constitute no more than a tiny minority in the three major professions of medicine, law, and engineering, but the proportion rose during the decade—from 4.6 to 6.1 per cent among doctors; from 0.3 to 1.2 per cent among engineers; and from 2.4 to 3.5 per cent among lawyers and judges.

Legislation on Employment of Women

IN THE EARLY DAYS of American industrial development, when the country's labor supply was ample and immigration unrestricted, wages were low even in relation to prevailing low prices. Many women found it necessary to seek work outside the home in order to supplement inadequate earnings of the family head. Largely unskilled and with virtually no organized bargaining power, such women became easy victims of exploitation. Agitation of reform groups to better the working conditions and pay of women led finally to enactment of numerous state laws applying solely to the woman worker.

Most of the statutes were designed to protect the health of employed women and safeguard their function as bearers and rearers of children. In recent years legislation aimed at equalizing woman's competitive position in the labor market has tended at times to withdraw the protection afforded by the earlier enactments. Employment of women is subject today to a hodge-podge of state laws which both aid and hamper their advancement.

RISE OF STATE LAWS TO PROTECT WOMEN WORKERS

Massachusetts initiated the first official investigation of women's labor conditions more than a century ago. The inquiry was prompted by a petition in 1845 from the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association, which asserted that women working 14 hours a day under unhealthy conditions

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were "hastening through pain, disease, and privation down to a premature grave." The legislative committee which conducted the study concluded that the state should not require a reduction in the hours of labor, because that would weaken the competitive position of Massachusetts industry.

Thirty years later, however, Massachusetts became the first state to enact a maximum hours law with enough teeth in it to permit effective enforcement. Previous statutes of the kind, adopted initially by Ohio in 1852 and thereafter by Minnesota, the Territory of Dakota, and Massachusetts itself, had provided no penalties for violation. The early laws set a maximum work day of ten hours for women employed in particular places of work, chiefly factories, machine shops and, somewhat later, mercantile establishments.

California in 1893 passed the first law requiring a weekly day of rest for women workers. Other states soon followed suit, and application of the measures eventually was extended to men workers.¹⁰ The first law prohibiting employment of women at night was enacted by Massachusetts in 1890; it set a 10 P.M. deadline for women in factory jobs. Other states followed with laws either prohibiting or regulating employment of women after specified evening hours. Other measures adopted about that time regulated conditions of industrial home work, limited the number of successive days a woman might work, required seating facilities, rest periods, and rest rooms for women workers, and prohibited their employment in specific jobs.

Minimum wage legislation was based originally on the premise that an employer's failure to pay a woman enough to live decently was detrimental to her health and morals. Massachusetts enacted the first minimum wage law in 1912. Eight western states put similar statutes into force the following year, and other states did the same during the ensuing decade.¹¹ All of the laws applied only to women.

Equal pay legislation is a later development, aimed not

¹⁰ Many of these laws were essentially Sunday "blue laws," forbidding work on the Sabbath.

¹¹ The U.S. Supreme Court in 1923 found a District of Columbia minimum wage law unconstitutional as a violation of freedom of contract (*Adkins v. Children's Hospital*, 226 U.S. 525). Some states continued to enforce their minimum wage laws, but others ceased doing so. The high court reversed its 1923 decision in 1937 when it held, in a case involving the minimum wage law of the State of Washington, that a state had power to restrict freedom of contract in the public interest (*West Coast Hotel Co. v. Parrish*, 300 U.S. 379).

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only to protect women workers from exploitation, but also to prevent undercutting of men's wages. Michigan and Montana were the first to introduce equal pay requirements, in 1919, but no other state did so until World War II. A dozen equal pay measures went on the books during the 1940s.

CURRENT TRENDS IN STATE LEGISLATION FOR WOMEN

The states still regularly enact a considerable amount of new legislation or amend earlier statutes pertaining to employment of women. In the years 1953-1956, legislatures in two-thirds of the states adopted no fewer than 64 laws or amendments affecting women workers. Three states (Idaho, New Mexico, Wyoming) enacted their first minimum wage laws for women in 1955; three others (Arkansas, Colorado, Oregon) enacted equal pay laws; and 12 states adopted new hours-of-work measures.

Today all states except three (Alabama, Florida, Iowa) have statutes in force to govern at least one aspect of female employment. All except five states regulate the hours of work, typically an eight-hour day or 48-hour week, in one or more industries. Around half the states specify that 20 minutes to an hour be allowed women workers for meal periods, and eight states require rest periods—usually ten minutes—during the work span of certain jobs. Twenty states restrict night employment of women.

The trend of recent hours legislation has been to ease some of the earlier restrictions. Since 1955 three states (Arkansas, Massachusetts, Nebraska) have reduced rest period requirements for women in 24-hour shift plants; Delaware and New York have relaxed night work bans on women workers in certain industries; Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, and Vermont have amended hours laws to permit up to a ten-hour day in various occupations. Ohio removed prohibitions against employment of women in certain jobs (such as driving delivery trucks and operating freight elevators) and equalized work period limitations for both sexes in public transportation.

Some of the changes have been made in answer to demands of women workers, many of whom feel that protective laws restrict their job opportunities. Others have resulted from the economic needs of particular industries or regions. Vermont, for example, provided in 1956 that

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seasonal industries might employ women for a 60-hour week during peak periods lasting no longer than ten weeks.

The largest amount of regulatory activity has to do with establishment of minimum wages for women. Twenty-nine states, three territories, and the District of Columbia have minimum wage laws; 20 of the laws authorize wage boards to establish minimums for different groups of women workers and to revise the minimums as conditions change. Bottom pay rates, now typically ranging from 60c to \$1 an hour, are usually set for industries and occupations where workers are traditionally low-paid and where they are not organized. In eight states and three territories the minimum wage laws have been broadened to cover men as well as women.

Equal pay laws have been enacted by 16 states¹² and Alaska. Four states have put such laws on their books since 1952. In all except two states, the laws apply to most types of private employment; in Illinois and Michigan only to manufacturing. The groups most often exempted from coverage are agricultural and domestic workers and employees of non-profit organizations. Most of the laws prohibit employers from paying a lower rate to a woman than to a man for the same or comparable work.

Effectiveness of the equal pay laws depends largely on the degree of enforcement, which varies considerably. Though making no provision for inspection, the statutes usually permit employees to bring civil suits against employers for wages due. Some of the laws contain loopholes which encourage evasion. Wage differentials may be allowed where there is "a difference [among workers] in availability for other operations" or according to whether the job calling for a specific rate is performed by the worker regularly or only occasionally. Employers may be allowed also to pay different rates when a "reasonable differentiation" other than sex can be established.¹³

Although most federal labor legislation applies to men as well as women workers, some of the federal laws affect the status of women workers indirectly. The Fair Labor

¹² Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington.

¹³ Sixteen states and the District of Columbia require equal pay for teachers. About half the states have civil service systems which rule out sex discrimination in pay.

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Standards Act of 1938, by establishing a minimum hourly rate of pay and fixing the eight-hour day and 40-hour week as basic pay periods, in effect established a floor below which women employed in production for interstate commerce could not undercut wages paid to men. Later increases in the minimum wage, most recently to \$1 an hour, have helped to even up pay rates at the bottom of the scale.

CALL FOR FEDERAL "EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK" LAW

The equal pay principle was established in the railroad industry by federal legislation in 1918. Five years later the Classification Act for federal employees created a job rating and pay system which made no differentiations on account of sex.¹⁴ The War Labor boards in the two world wars and the Wage Stabilization Board in the Korean emergency refused to sanction pay discrimination on the ground of sex in wage disputes coming before them.

Both Republican and Democratic platforms in 1956 carried planks endorsing action to achieve equal pay for equal work.¹⁵ In his Economic Report last Jan. 23 the President described "enactment by the Congress of the principle of equal pay for equal work" as a desirable legislative step "toward equalizing economic opportunity for all citizens." The executive council of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations came out in June 1956 for federal equal pay legislation, and virtually every major national woman's organization has included it on its legislative program.

Almost the only opposition to federal legislation in this field has been that voiced by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers. Those organizations have approved the principle of equal pay for equal work but opposed action by Congress to require its observance. A similar stand was taken by the A.F.L. before it merged with the C.I.O. in December 1955; the Federation's earlier position was that the goal of equal pay could be attained more effectively through collective bargaining.

Both the Republican platform and the President's Eco-

¹⁴ One-third of all white collar workers employed by the federal government are women.

¹⁵ The Republican platform pledged the Eisenhower administration to "continue to fight for dynamic and progressive programs which, among other things, will assure equal pay for equal work regardless of sex." The Democratic platform advocated "legislation to provide equal pay for equal work, regardless of sex."

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conomic Report left some question as to whether the administration favored legislation that would go so far as to outlaw wage discrimination and make it the responsibility of the federal government to enforce equal pay for equal work in the sphere of interstate commerce. However, on Jan. 25, two days after the Economic Report was transmitted to Congress, Sen. H. Alexander Smith (R-N.J.), ranking Republican on the Senate Labor Committee, introduced a bill which would prohibit discrimination on account of sex in the payment of wages for production of goods in interstate commerce; the measure would be enforced by the Secretary of Labor through procedures similar to those utilized in administering the Fair Labor Standards Act.¹⁶ An accompanying statement described the bill as "a part of the legislative program of the Department of Labor."

Although women leaders are in general agreement on the benefits of equal pay legislation, they differ on the advantages of other protective laws. A number of organizations, of which the National Woman's Party and the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs are the most active, hold that the plethora of limiting regulations discourages employers from hiring women, or helps employers to justify payment of lower wages to women. These organizations advocate adoption of an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, which would forbid denial or abridgment of rights because of sex. Other organizations fear that such an amendment would invalidate special legislation for women.

Factors For and Against Women Workers

EFFORTS TO IMPROVE the status of the woman worker date back to the time, more than a century ago, when feminist leaders organized to fight for a bill of rights for women. Feminists of that day held two grievances against a society which frowned on the career woman: (1) The woman worker, or the wife of the low-paid male worker,

¹⁶ The bill was co-sponsored by Sens. Irving M. Ives (R-N.Y.) and William A. Purtell (R-Conn.). Rep. Edith Green (D-Ore.) has offered a similar bill in the House. A bill introduced by Rep. Frances P. Bolton (R-Ohio) would call on the Secretary of Labor to investigate wage differentials on account of sex, the effect of such differentials on wages of men, and the effectiveness of state equal pay laws.

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was condemned to a life of hard toil with no opportunity for economic betterment; (2) the idle wife in a well-to-do family was made a parasite. As late as 1911, a woman leader noted that while necessity was drawing increasing numbers of women "into the stream of modern economic life," their employment opportunities were still circumscribed by "artificial constrictions and conventions, the remnants of a past condition of society."¹⁷

Actually, women in many societies have worked for gain outside the home since ancient times, but their tasks have always tended to be of relatively low grade. The fact that a woman earned her living was apt to be taken as a mark of inferior social position.¹⁸ With the coming of the industrial revolution, industry sought out women as a source of cheap, unskilled labor, but at the same time society continued to hold that woman's place was the home.

Shortages of male labor during World War I did more to draw women out of the home into factory, service, and office jobs than anything had done before. Taking such jobs then was a laudable and patriotic thing to do, but fear of competition from women workers manifested itself in labor unions soon after the war, even though many of them were leaving the labor force in the natural course of events. However, many other women stayed on, and the position of women workers was further solidified in World War II when they were called not only to take civilian jobs vacated by men but also to enter uniformed women's units in the armed services.¹⁹

Although the popular concept of women as marginal workers—the supplementary rather than the primary support of families—persists to an appreciable degree, it is generally taken for granted today that a girl, on completing school, will take a job at least until she marries. Marriage, moreover, is no longer regarded as a barrier to employment, nor does the fact that a wife works reflect unfavorably on her husband's position. Virtually the only woman whose job-holding is open to serious criticism is the mother of small children; even here the subject is one for debate.

¹⁷ Olive Schreiner, *Woman and Labor* (1911), p. 17.

¹⁸ The anthropologist, Margaret Mead, has noted that in primitive societies "occupations traditionally pursued by men are the ones to which prestige is attached"; this applies "even in societies where women fish and men do headwork." *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (Vol. 15, 1934), p. 440.

¹⁹ See "Women in War Work," *E.R.R.*, Vol. I 1942, pp. 63-78, and "Women Workers After the War," *E.R.R.*, Vol. I 1944, pp. 225-200.

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TENDENCY TO MOVE IN AND OUT OF THE LABOR FORCE

Home responsibilities of women, of married women in particular, still have substantial effect on the basic characteristics of the female labor force. This in turn tends to sustain traditional disparities in job attainment between the sexes. As a group, women have a more intermittent attachment to the labor force; about one-third of all women workers are not employed continuously through the year on full-time jobs.²⁰ A census survey last December showed one-fourth of white women workers on part time as compared with one-tenth of white men workers; among non-whites the ratios of part-time employment were 35.6 per cent among women and 18.7 per cent among men.

Shifting in and out of the labor force may not be a matter of choice for women; in various communities the prevalent job opportunities do not offer steady employment. But many women prefer an intermittent work pattern. The growing percentage of married women in the labor force, resulting primarily from current high marriage rates, reinforces the tendency to off-and-on employment. Nearly 30 per cent of all married women, in contrast to 15 per cent in 1940, are working today; married women living with their husbands constitute slightly more than one-half of all women workers.

Lack of firm attachment to the labor force supports employer prejudice against promoting women to more important jobs. This affects the prospects not only of the casual employee but also of the skilled worker determined to get ahead. In industry it tends to discourage employers from investing the money required to train a young woman who will have to give up the job when she marries and has a baby, or who may leave town because her husband is transferred to another city. In business it perpetuates a habit of overlooking women when top management posts are open.

Brig. Gen. David Sarnoff, board chairman of the Radio Corporation of America, has blamed "habit and tradition" for the fact that no woman is a vice president of his company.²¹ R.C.A., however, has a woman on its board of directors, Mrs. Mildred McAfee Horton, former president

²⁰ Of 28 million women who worked at some time in 1955, 8 million or 29 per cent worked less than 35 hours a week; another 4½ million or 17 per cent worked half a year or less.

²¹ Speech at Conference on the Effective Use of Womanpower, sponsored by U.S. Women's Bureau, Washington, D. C., Mar. 10, 1955.

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of Wellesley College and wartime head of the Waves. On the other hand, efforts several years ago to add a woman to the board of the American Telephone and Telegraph Co. got nowhere.

INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF JOB-HOLDING TO WOMEN

In spite of a long-standing assumption that the motivations for advancement are not so strong in women as in men workers, there is considerable evidence that holding down a job and getting ahead are becoming matters of increasing importance in the lives of American women. The influx of wives into the labor force, particularly those who return to work after their children reach school age, is indicative of a mounting drive for gainful employment where child care does not require a woman's presence at home. More and more the typical work pattern for women is to remain in employment continuously, except for a break of 10 to 15 years in the child-bearing years. The back-to-work movement among mothers of older children accounts in large part for a rise in the average age of working women from 32 years in 1940 to 39 today.

Even young mothers are going into the labor force with more frequency. More than 18 per cent of mothers of pre-school children now work, compared with 7 per cent in 1940. The labor force today includes approximately 6½ million women with children under 18, and 2½ million of this group have at least one child less than six years old.

The drive is partly economic, partly a response to the social approval bestowed on a person who is "doing something." While only one-half of the four million women who are heads of families²² are in the labor force, most other women workers contribute significantly to the family income. Double earnings in many American families have contributed importantly to the high level of buying power of recent years.

Concern frequently is expressed over the effect on family life of the influx of women into the working community. Some educators believe that schools should put more stress on the social values of homemaking in present-day society. A male author recently complained that "young girls are steered into careers by schools and colleges," that "careers

²² One of every ten families in the United States is headed by a woman.

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for women are being glamorized out of all proportion and . . . the work of a good wife is being made to appear far more drab than it actually is." ²³ A successful business-woman who was also a wife and mother replied that women who work not only engage in productive labor to aid the family, as in the days when they did spinning, weaving, and baking in the home, but also usually become "warmer, more loving, more understanding, more dedicated wives." ²⁴

FUTURE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY

Whatever the merits of this long-standing debate, it is clear that women have become a fixed and irreplaceable factor in the national economy and that their role therein is likely to grow more rather than less important. The overriding factor in expansion of the female labor force, and the rise in its status, has been simply the need of the economy for participation of women in the work to be done. All projections of manpower requirements of the future look to women as a major labor source.

Government recognition of this fact was implicit in the creation in September 1954 of the office of Assistant to the Secretary of Labor for Women's Affairs. Secretary of Labor Mitchell has predicted that "The demand for women's services . . . will continue to grow very much as our labor force strives to meet the increasing demands being made on it." He is convinced that "Women will be asked in the future to fill new jobs, jobs they have little chance of obtaining today." ²⁵

The Labor Department estimated last month that by 1965 the total labor force will have grown by ten million, and that one-half of the increase will be accounted for by women. The total female force at that time is expected to number 26.2 million. Most of the anticipated increase will be among younger and older women; little gain is expected among those aged 25-34, the "group in which most women are occupied with child raising and homemaking." Occupationally, the greatest proportionate rise—35 per cent — is expected among professional and technical workers. ²⁶

²³ Sloan Wilson, "The Woman in the Gray Flannel Suit," *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 15, 1956, p. 36.

²⁴ Bernice Fitz-Gibbon, "Woman in the Gay Flannel Suit," *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 29, 1956, p. 15.

²⁵ Conference on Effective Use of Womanpower, Washington, D. C., Mar. 10, 1955.

²⁶ U.S. Department of Labor, *Our Manpower Future, 1955-65*, (January 1957).

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The Census Bureau says that if the present rate of female participation in the work force remains constant, 27.5 million women will be at work by 1975. However, if the trends in employment of women over the past 35 years are projected, the female labor force will go up to 32.5 million, with nearly 40 per cent of all women over 14 at work. If only the trends of the period 1950-1955 are considered, the potential would be even higher: 33.6 million comprising 41.1 per cent of the female population of working age.

PROGRAMS FOR UPGRADING WOMEN WORKERS

Whether women will occupy more higher-echelon jobs in the future will depend on whether larger numbers come to regard work as a major part of their lives. Many manpower specialists think that remaining employer prejudice will fall away when women are fully trained and prepared to devote themselves seriously to improvement of their qualifications. Secretary of Labor Mitchell told a recent conference on women workers that it was imperative "to raise the level of skill of the womanpower of this country . . . as a national resource."

Various programs are under way to encourage young women to prepare for skilled or technical employment in shortage fields, even if they plan to drop out temporarily after marriage. Other programs are aimed at giving training or refresher courses to older women whose household responsibilities diminish as their children grow up. The U.S. Women's Bureau has explored the growing potential for employment of women in such male-dominated fields as accounting and engineering. The Bureau has given special attention also to encouraging local programs to prepare the mature woman for employment.

A number of women's professional societies make efforts to stimulate the interest of women in occupations in which members of their sex are still in a small minority. Such organizations as the American Society of Women Accountants, the National Association of Bank Women, and the Society of Women Engineers are in excellent position to counsel young women on the opportunities, necessary qualifications, and most effective approaches for obtaining employment and advancement in those fields.

The American Association of University Women stresses the economic advantages to women of higher education; it

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regularly awards scholarships and fellowships to women of notable promise or achievement in various professional pursuits. The Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs attempts to give working women the kind of social backing that men get from such clubs as Rotary. One of its active programs is called "Career advancement." The retiring president of the organization told the membership last July: "The only reason that women on the whole are still down on the slope is because we haven't fully made up our minds to aim for the top."²⁷

²⁷ Marguerite Rawalt, address, convention of National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, Miami Beach, July 1, 1956.



